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MEETING OF THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

MRS. ELLA ADAMS MOORE

Secretary

The regular meeting of the Parents' Association was held on Thursday evening, November 16, at eight o'clock. The following topics were discussed: (1) "Would a More Elastic Curriculum Better Serve the Interests of the School and the Children?" (2) "How Far Should the Policy of Special Teachers for Specific Subjects be Carried, Especially in the Lower Grades;" (3) "How Far is it Desirable and How Far Possible to Maintain the 'Small Group' System in the Elementary School?" (4) "Home Work."

The discussion was opened by Mrs. James H. Tufts, who had prepared the program. Mrs. Tufts said that in regard to the first question the problem was how to ease up the school work when necessary or desirable; that always somewhere in the child's life there came a time when he could not do the full amount of school work without too much physical strain, or a parent may wish a child to devote more time to music, and so would lighten the school program; or a mother may wish her daughter to carry out more fully in the home the domestic-science training. There were many reasons why it was desirable that there should be some arrangement whereby the school work could be lightened without the child's feeling the onus of dropping behind his class.

As touching the second question, Mrs. Tufts said that as a parent followed a child from one thing to another, the question arose whether, in the desire to get the best possible instruction, we were not sacrificing unification and concentration. Looking for the origin of the condition which reflects itself both in the home and the school—namely a willingness to undertake a task, but an unwillingness to pursue it to an end—would it not be better to give more into the hands of the grade teachers, even

if some expert knowledge were sacrificed? A mother undertook to help out all along the line; why not less rather than more specialization in the school in the teaching force.

Both the first and second questions overlapped the third. The best-teaching work was done on an individual basis. In a laboratory ten or twelve were as many as could be well managed. In languages, small groups were necessary. Was it not possible that, with the increasing number of pupils and the school's increasing popularity, we were losing sight of the theories on which the school was based, and which had contributed so much to its success?

As regards the home work, it was a ghost which ever rose and would never down. Mrs. Tufts hoped that in the discussion it would be possible to get at the logic of the questions and find out why or why not.

The meeting was thrown open to discussion. A very full discussion followed, in which the following points were made:

Mrs. Allinson said that the individual child should be the unit of the group. There was the need of recognizing different temperaments. In the seventh and eighth grades the pupil should go as rapidly or as slowly as advisable. How could this be adjusted? The number of children to the teachers should be limited. There should also be a difference in tuition for the amount of work. We must break up and loosen the lines. It was not a question of finishing the work in a given time, but of adapting the work to the individual child. Parents are apt to feel more than the school that the generous repast offered to the children is sometimes more than can be assimilated.

Mr. Owen said that there had always been a number of the Elementary School children doing work in the High School in some special subjects, in which they were particularly advanced, from the fifth grade up.

Mrs. Harding said that what had impressed her was the desirability for some change on account of the great sensitiveness of those children who could not keep up. Such children should do partial work and perhaps take the eighth grade in two years, but so explained and arranged that there would be

no feeling of disgrace. Perhaps this came from the strong feeling in the public schools.

Dr. Montgomery said that, from a physician's standpoint, he had found that a child's health often suffered from a mental state induced by a return to school behind his grade or class. If a child is taken out of school for a time, there is the same feeling of discontent and unhappiness, all of which influence the health. If for the seventh and eighth grades and the first two years in the high school a course could be laid out by which a student could take as many years as he wished to complete the course, it would be a wise plan.

Mr. Owen said that in the University High School what had been spoken of was a regular custom; that there were people all the time who finished in anywhere from three to six years.

Mrs. Allinson asked if there were not a great discrepancy between the elementary and high schools in this respect.

Miss Stillwell said that the criticism of the school had usually been that it did not have a curriculum, rather than that it had too much; that the curriculum was perfectly flexible; and that any child in the eighth grade could take full or part work. The curriculum was based on the powers of the average child, and those who could do the work were given the opportunity.

Mr. Gillett stated that, as regards the sensitiveness on the part of any child as to keeping up with the work, not more than one-tenth of the class knew of any difference in the handling of a child who was not carrying out the full schedule. The teacher did not think of it. Promotions came any time.

Mr. Jackman said that he was continually beset by parents who wanted their children to have more work. He had been standing against the tendency of parents to rush their children. The course should be a matter of natural growth. He considered the grading system artificial and bad. There were practical difficulties, however, in the way of a child who was in the fifth grade reciting in some one subject in the third or the eighth. In order to get out of the grade ruts, he was forming various clubs, such as the camera, microscope, etc., whose membership should include students from all grades.

Mrs. Harding reported an experiment in the old Laboratory School, where the work of a number of children in about the seventh or eighth grades was very greatly lightened and much out-of-door occupation given. The work was increased a little year by year, and that group of children entered college with no loss of time, with the average abilities and preparation, and much better health.

The second question then came up for discussion.

Mr. MacClintock said that we were all drifting in the direction of the teacher who knew what he was teaching. He thought the trouble was in carrying too many subjects at one time.

Miss Port suggested that with very young children, if a teacher knew how to handle the children, it was not so much matter what she taught. She was afraid that her first-grade children might grow dizzy with eight new people to take them in charge. The critic-teacher must see that the eight people are working together. If the work stands as a whole, and not in parts, in the minds of the children, then the teacher has made the necessary union.

Miss Wygant said that all who had been watching children had seen signs of too much rush. The question was: Are you willing that your child should have no experience in clay, color, music; or are you willing that they should not have the help they need? How make the work simple enough and quiet enough? Is it possible that the special teacher should spend some of the time she spends in training the children in training the critic-teacher so she could do the work.

Mrs. Thomsen thought that it lay in the grade teacher's work so to unify the work that the children would not be dazed. She did feel that often, on account of the number of special teachers and stops, the room teacher had come to cut her work off short.

Several parents testified as to the keen interest of their children in the school, and that the work was not overtaxing, but healthful and stimulating.

The meeting adjourned.